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Valuable possibilities for managing people – inspiration from training a sheepdog.

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1 Introduction

It was an evening in July. Scot, at that point of time, a one-year-old border collie, finally showed significant signs of being able to handle sheep. What a relief. I could not count the number of times I had been ready to give up and send him away. He had been a late starter in showing interest in sheep. It had been a challenging task till now, and my patience had been tested several times. I had been frustrated because I only had myself to blame. Three inexperienced actors learning their roles in a complicated game. A group of undogged sheep, that did not know how to react to this new threat that suddenly came into their lives. A novice sheepdog handler, with only theoretical knowledge of how to create control of different sets of survival instincts. And a young strong teenage border collie. But this sunny evening the pieces suddenly created the desired pattern. The sheep around my feet. Scot finding his point of balance. Doing his flanks on my command. It was not pretty. There was a lot of work to be done. But we all suddenly had an idea of how to play our roles in this complicated game called sheep handling.

This paper is not about sheepdog training. However, the paper is inspired by personal experiences with sheepdog training. Experiences that led to reflections on the roots of many of the mainstream management models and ideas that we within the field of business administration teach our students and thereby they bring them with them into practice as forms of conventional wisdom. The models and ideas are clear coated with a certain management ideal and with that ideal a certain way to perceive other human beings. A perception that can work counterproductive to what we want to achieve with each other and for the organisation we unite around and within. Because the management ideal comes as a clear coating to the management models and ideas we have brought with us, and because of the clearness of the coating, the ideal does not by itself call for reflections about the contextual origin of these models, and whether the management ideal still fits managing today.

This paper makes reflections on these origins. From my own field, management accounting, examples of such techniques are standard costing and traditional budgeting, techniques that usually rest on a belief in a unidirectional sequence of Plan, Do, Control, with a solid separation between Plan, Control and Do. It is the classical management and organisational behaviour models that still occupy our perception of organisational behaviour, that these accounting techniques are intended to back up and put into motion (e.g. Miller and O'Leary, 1987). The management ideal underneath such an approach can be illustrated as a foreman standing in a glass office inspecting the workers on the shopfloor. Monitoring the work done without direct intervention and watching for deviations from the plan and directives given.

This paper suggests a management ideal that is more in line with a janitor. A person that facilitates that people can act in line with their values within a clear setting. Acting in a way that is fruitful for both the company and the employee. The practice of such a person could be termed an interactive/reflective epistemic method (Jakobsen, 2024). An epistemic method requires a combination of analytical skills and a sense of empathy and sensitivity regarding what is at play, and how the phenomena at play can become object of discussion without violating the values of the other.

Another idea to have in mind in this endeavour to search for a different management ideal is life-friendliness. “*Life-friendly form is attentive, honest, open, and responsive to the concerns of the other. It is attentive to obtain an adequate impression of the concern of the other, and to ensure that the other understands the intention of responding expressions.*” (Nørreklit and Paulsen, 2023). It is about seeing the other as a subject, an actor with unique potentials, that must be nurtured and invited into a dialogue about what to plan for, how to do it, and find forms to evaluate the results obtained.

Most traditional management models and the management ideal they relate to are built on a simple stimuli-response assumption about human nature, where cognition and peoples’ values are taken out of the equation. A form of abjection (Kristeva, 2024) takes place, where people are being set aside and detached from norms and rules regarding how to act and perform a certain task. The stimuli-response assumption can be traced back to Pavlov’s dogs (e.g. Jarius and Wildemann, 2015). Pavlov’s stimuli-response observations made on dogs and subsequent conceptualisation of the observed behaviour have travelled into organizational and management thinking and have embedded itself into these theories to a degree that has made people stop reflecting about the reasonability of this generalization from basic dog instincts to human actions. The models have been clear coated with a certain management ideal.

The purpose of this paper is to show that living beings that are supposed to perform challenging tasks under conditions that cannot be described in detail must be driven by their values, and that managing under such conditions becomes a matter of facilitating what will be termed valuable possibilities. The purpose is driven by personal sheepdog training experiences presented throughout the paper as small vignettes. This anecdotal evidence, supported by analyses of experienced sheepdog trainer’s reflections on sheepdog training questions the relevance of Pavlov’s dog training experiments in relation to more advanced dog training, and is supported by research in the dog training field (e.g. Pęgowski, 2015). This lack of ability to generalize within forms of dog training will indicate that it is worth questioning the dominating way of perceiving human beings and modelling human behaviour that traditional management models and techniques subscribe to. It is time to drop our tools (Weick, 1996), to unlearn this simple-minded stimuli-response idea that may have fitted into the production rationales and human resources available in the early nineteen hundred as prescribed by Frederick Taylor (1919), and begin teaching and favour researching both the organisation and management accounting field in a more sophisticated way that embraces the values of living beings. Not through more experiments, neuro-activity measurements, and similar techniques that claim to measure human brain structures and behaviour. Instead, our endeavours to understand organisational behaviour must be seen in the light of humans as independent, knowledgeable, and reflective actors. Such suggestion is not new. For instance the life-work of Peter F. Drucker revolved around this idea (e.g. Drucker, 1974). But despite this, management models that supports such ontological idea still seems to come short, and there seem to be a need to form managerial thinking that focus on people as reflective actors and that the managerial support to knowledge worker must be based on interpretive/reflective epistemic methods (e.g. Linneberg et al., 2021, Mauro et al., 2023, Jakobsen, 2024, Liboriussen et al., 2021).

1.1 From dogs to organizational behaviour and management models

We have been in the training ring for 10 minutes. Scot, four anxious sheep and me. The sheep have been good at being around my feet, Scot has been good at responding to my commands: lay down, away and come by. He has been focused both on me and the sheep, constantly trying to lure the situation, and be prepared for the next move. It has been clear from his movements and eye looks that his brain has been working at full speed during the training session. Now he has started to go a bit closer to the sheep. I think I will give him a break. Take him outside the ring let him do a couple of inner flankings as fast as he can run. This usually takes the steam from his head, and will allow us to go back to the ring, and do some more basic training inside the ring without harming the sheep and their trust in that I will protect them from Scot.

In 1904, Ivan Petrovich Pavlov was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine “... in recognition of his work on the physiology of digestion, through which knowledge on vital aspects of the subject has been transformed and enlarged.” (AB, 2023). His primary scientific work hence contributed to our understanding of digestion. To conduct his main studies, he needed saliva, and for this purpose he used dogs to whom he served food, the dogs began to drool, which gave Pavlov the possibility to extract and examine the saliva. When Pavlov and his assistants got saliva drawn from the dogs, they observed that the dogs began drooling as soon as the dog could hear or see that the drawing was about to begin. Pavlov then began to test if he could stimulate the drooling by other means than food. He could. Often a bell is mentioned as the stimuli that Pavlov used to trigger the response – drooling. But also other sounds, smells, and signs were used to replicate his experiment (e.g. Jarius and Wildemann, 2015). Pavlov then developed his conceptual framework, where a certain stimulus called the unconditioned stimulus, would cause a natural, unlearned, or instinctive, unconditioned response. What Pavlov then did was to present the food (unconditioned stimulus) for the dog while ringing the bell (conditioned stimulus) in order to create a conditioned response in the form of drooling. This stage of learning is called acquisition. After a number of repetitions, the dog will begin drooling solely based on the sound of the

bell. However, Pavlov also realised that the relationship between the conditioned stimulus and the conditioned response had to be repeated, otherwise an extinction would happen, and the dog would stop responding to the conditioned stimulus.

Pavlov along with John B. Watson can be said to be the founders of classical conditioning (Watson, 1913) and thereby behaviourism. A central assumption in this field is to ignore cognition, and focus on what the objects do when they are exposed to certain stimuli (e.g. Shimp, 1989). Burrhus Frederic Skinner is another highly influential figure within behaviourism (e.g. Morris et al., 2005). Though his approach and the terms operant conditioning and reinforcement are less stringent than the similar concepts applied under classical conditioning, Skinner's form of behaviourism still decouples cognition from the objects it investigates (Skinner, 1977). Behaviourism has travelled into organisational behaviourism, and in that way influenced how students of the business administration field are formed into thinking regarding future employees and how to motivate them. In relation to management accounting stimulus-response schemas in the form of bonus systems, performance management models, monitoring schemes and so on, are still shaping the presentation of how to control people.

The very idea that you use experiments on animals to say something about how humans will behave seems peculiar. Most people will agree that there is a huge difference between dogs drooling and managing a complex social setting, like a company. As such behaviourism has been subject to critique from many sides (e.g. Rutherford, 2009). This paper also has a critical view on behaviourism and the neglect of cognition. But instead of making yet another frontal attack on the field of behaviourism, this paper offers an alternative form of critique. The paper pursues its purpose by conducting a form of contrafactual analysis (e.g. Sylvan and Majeski, 1998, Bunzl, 2004, Wenzlhuemer, 2009) of the development of the behaviourism field. Instead of the fact that Pavlov incidentally developed the stimulus-response conceptual framework as a spinoff from his main research on digestion, this turning point (Collins, 2007) is replaced by the possibility that Pavlov had needed more complex tasks from his dogs than simply production of saliva.

With all due respect to all the forms of activities that humans have trained and used dogs for, the work of a sheepdog is one of the most challenging tasks. The job of handling sheep involves three actors: the shepherd, the sheep, and the dog. All three actors engage in the work with different motives, but somehow these three motives must integrate to succeed, where success for most practical purposes is defined as gathering a flock of sheep in a fast and calm way where none of the three actors are harmed. This requires cooperation on a highly sophisticated level. When the sheepdog works it does so autonomously. This is unlike other working dogs. For instance, police dogs are most often carrying out their duty in a leash, which allows the police dog handler to have direct control over the dog. This is not possible for a sheepdog handler because this would hinder the dog from performing its task. Wearing a long leash when gathering sheep would most likely make the dog be wrapped into trees and rocks with the risk of harming itself and certainly being unable to do its job. In addition, the dog is most often expected to work at far distances from the handler. Sending the dog out for sheep is often done under conditions where the shepherd cannot see the sheep. For instance, working in the mountains in northwest England requires that the shepherd sends the dogs out in a terrain where control cannot be done by direct commands (Rebanks, 2015). It is a task that requires that the dog knows its job, namely, to find the sheep and their lambs, and bring them all down to the shepherd. With this goal in mind the dog must improvise and find ways to gather the sheep without hurting itself and jeopardizing the lives of the sheep by going too tight to them and thereby making them flee down a mountain side with all the risk for injury this causes.

Therefore, sheepdogs cannot be handled using direct control. As such, the relationship between the shepherd and the dog must be based on trust built up through hours of training, and a set of compatible values that all parties will respect. Autonomy hence must be understood in at least two ways: a matter of being able to work in a self-governing way, and to act in accordance with moral duty rather than desires. The last part involving a Kantian moral philosophical approach, though it is by no means argued that border collies hold philosophical skills. However, *"They are the smartest breed left. ... Border collies are bred to be your independent thinking problem solving partner, that is willing to take your directions. So, if I have sheep at the top of the mountain and I do not want to go up there myself, I send this dog, he is going to take care of that job for me. But we have kept his breeding in way so that he is able to solve the problem himself. And talk to these sheep by himself, and bring them down in a nice calm gentle manner."* (DocumentaryTV, 2017).

This small introduction to the practice of sheepdogs should reveal that the skills of a sheepdog go far beyond a doctrine of: do what you are told and get your reward. Those who think that sheepdog training can be done via a handful of biscuits that can be used to reward proper behaviour will not succeed. In an interview with Barbara Ray, Jeff Ishee asks: *"How do you reward the dog?"*, and Barbara immediately responds: *"Allow them to go keep working!"* (VPM, 2019). The work of a sheepdog is found to have many similarities to what is expected from an employee in a post-industrial society. Know the task, make contextual professional judgement, adapt to the context you must work within, and act in a responsible way. Gaining inspiration from sheepdog handling to understand management of knowledge workers is therefore found to be more useful than from dog training that involves drooling.

1.2 Research questions and outline of the paper

Based on this brief introduction to the origins of behaviourism and to the ideas of sheepdog training, the following research question will be addressed. The first research question is: *how is the language game of sheepdog trainers related to the behaviourism idea?* The answer to this question will allow us to question behaviourism as a dominating management idea, because if we cannot generalise from one dog task to another, then it is also questionable to generalise into human activities. Since the paper already has indicated a critical voice towards behaviourism for its ability to say something fruitful for managing people in a post-industrial society, it is found opportune to pursue the second research question, which is: *how do the sheepdog trainers construct a reality that works in relation to sheep handling in cooperation with a dog?* The intention is that such insight and conceptualisation can add to our understanding of how to mobilise actor's values and create co-authorship.

The following section of the paper outlines the metatheoretical framework employed for the analysis. The framework is Pragmatic Constructivism, and relevant concepts from this paradigm has been employed to inform the analysis. The section also outlines the method for data collection. In the analysis section, a theoretical account of how professional sheepdog trainers and handlers reflect upon sheepdog training is made. Reflections that are far from stimulus-response thinking, and more in line with the actor approach central for pragmatic constructivism. The paper will be ended with a discussion and concluding remarks. The paper will contribute to our understanding of managing highly skilled and motivated knowledge workers. The findings suggest that such people cannot be motivated through short-term oriented stimuli. These people are motivated through their work and the professional values that this work represents. Providing these people with valuable possibilities is hence the main managerial task for managers involved with supporting this type of employees.

2 Methodology

The analysis presented in this paper is informed by the paradigm of Pragmatic Constructivism (e.g. Nørreklit et al., 2016, Nørreklit, 2017a). A brief introduction to the paradigm and the central concepts from this paradigm used during the analysis will be introduced in the first subsection below here. In the following subsection the data material will be accounted for, and the specific method used for analysing the material will be explained to make it transparent how the results has been obtained.

2.1 Introduction to the Pragmatic Constructivism paradigm

The paper aims at analysing more complex social processes than simple stimuli response relations. Therefore, the analysis must be guided by a paradigmatic framework that is able to grasp these complexities. At the same time the framework must be open for identification of the less complicated stimuli response relations. Pragmatic constructivism is found to be able to provide a sufficiently wide lens to do so. Pragmatic constructivism has shown its ability to analyse complex matters in a wide range of settings. In healthcare (Tiitola et al., 2022, Marchetti and Petersen, 2021, Mitchell et al., 2021, Guven-Uslu and Seal, 2019), managing artistic events (Liboriussen et al., 2021), performance management in universities (Kure et al., 2021, Pianezzi et al., 2020, Mauro et al., 2023, Campanale and Mauro, 2022), and in production companies often in relation to different developing processes (Nielsen et al., 2015, Laine et al., 2016, Leotta et al., 2017, Jakobsen, 2017, Korhonen et al., 2021, Magnacca and Giannetti, 2023).

Pragmatic constructivism has as its main premise that people consciously seek to construct a reality that functions; we are intentional actors in the world (Nørreklit, 2017b). The reality of the actor consists of four dimensions: facts, possibilities, values, and communication. These four dimensions have to be integrated, and being an actor is a constant matter of integrating the four dimensions in order to function in the world. An actor's reality is a personal functioning practice in the world, and as such, a subset of the world (Nørreklit, 2017b, p. 28.). When our reality functions, we have an integrated reality. The fact dimension is our individual collection of experiences of what has worked before and under what conditions. In that sense facts are what we bring with us, it represents our past. Our possibilities are what we can image we can do. However, we cannot do everything we imagine. For instance, we can imagine we can fly, but without some form of technical support we as humans are unable to make use of this form of physical movements. Thereby an important element of constructing an integrated reality is the assessment of whether possibilities are in fact factual possible. (Nørreklit, 2017b, p. 32.). This assessment may require additional facts that we may not have ourselves. To acquire these additional facts, we communicate with someone or something in the world. Like we are interested in the world to seek inspiration for developing and construction our reality, other actors in the world may have an interest in us. Thereby communication becomes our gateway to the world and other actor's reality. A gateway not only for facts and inspiration, but also to validate our reality. Is it in line with other actor's reality? Do we have overlapping perceptions of how the world is? And are we able to function together? Can we co-author our realities? The final dimension, our values, is what means something for us as actors. Thereby our values are also what

guides us when we make decisions about what possibilities to choose (Nørreklit, 2011, p. 28). It is not only a matter of what is factually possible, we must also value this possibility in order to construct a functioning reality.

When different actors work together, they become co-authors. Co-authoring is when actors construct a joint functioning practice. This happens by using common possibilities to solve joint tasks. The joint functioning practice requires that the values of the participating actors are not violated. Co-authoring requires that some values must be bended, but not broken, as this would not be an integrated reality for the actor whose values has been violated.

The analysis in this paper sidelines two different concepts instincts and values. An instinct is by the Britannica Dictionary defined as: “a way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is not learned: a natural desire or tendency that makes you want to act in a particular way.” (Britannica, 2023). Normally when seeking explanation for the behaviour of animals the term instinct is applied. When the term value is used in relation to animals it is most often in cases of anthropomorphizing, which is certainly not the intention of this paper. Therefore, a clarification of this sidelining is necessary.

Pragmatic Constructivism distinguish between basic values and instrumental values (Nørreklit, 2017b, p. 43). Basic values are subjective and our real motivators to act. Often when we engage in social settings, we cannot obtain our basic values directly. Instead, we seek fulfilment of our basic values through instrumental values – resources, positions, acknowledgement from others, etc. Sometimes this urge for instrumental values becomes so intense that the person lose sight of hers/his basic values, and life becomes dominated by aesthetics (e.g. Kierkegaard, 2004). In such state the person loose contact with her/his basic values, and it is difficult for such person to be an actor (Nørreklit, 2011, p. 28), because one becomes slave to fulfilment of these values through an external party that dictates the premises for this fulfilment. Clearly values are something we as human beings can reflect upon and cognitively act upon. Particularly when it comes to instrumental values and how far we will let these take us from our basic values. When it comes to basic values, these are less changeable. They are also more difficult to express and conceptualize, and as such often reveals themselves as feelings. Thereby the concepts instinct and basic values has similarities, and the sidelining of the two concepts is found to be an acceptable take, when it is kept in mind that there are differences.

The term language game is being used during the analysis. The term is obtained from the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1967). Work that has been of great inspiration for the development of Pragmatic Constructivism due to the emphasis on the close relationship between language and action in specific contexts (Nørreklit, 2017b). Language games are also referred to as forms of life, whereas the phenomena of interest regarding behaviourism is facts of life (e.g. Luckhardt, 1983, Gier, 1982). In that sense behaviourism reveals itself as an extreme reduction of human life, by focusing solely on facts, which is characteristic for the type of control regimes that the paper will question (e.g. Nørreklit et al., 2006).

2.2. Method used for the analysis

The data used in this paper is based on secondary data obtained from YouTube videos. These videos are based on different sources, but what characterised them is that they contain interviews or conversations where a sheepdog handler explains how he or she trains and work with sheepdogs. Along with the conversations, the videos are accompanied with recordings of training or work sessions with sheepdogs. These recordings add a further dimension to the analysis because it allows to analyse the language game of sheepdog handling. There are several books available on the market on how to train sheepdogs, and also books that are based on recognised trainers experiences (e.g. Sykes, 2012, Molloy and Nadelman, 2008). Though these books have been used as inspiration for the analysis, they miss the dimension of what is going on. Are the dogs in fact able to do what the handler talks about. The videos have this dimension and as such they allow a form of observing analysis of the language game of sheepdog training and handling.

The search for material began by searching: “Sheepdog training” via the YouTube search field. YouTube do not display an exact number of hits that come up based on such search. Instead, the initial list was used as a starting point for a more qualitative search of videos that contained both discussions of and explanations to the actions presented in the movie part of the video. Hence, a sort of screening has initially been made, and after that the algorithms of YouTube has taken over to present relevant material. This approach has similarities to snowball sampling (e.g. Parker et al., 2019). Snowball sampling in the sense that when one video has been selected and watched, the algorithms of YouTube guide one to the next set of videos. The criteria for selecting videos in the further analysis has been that the video contains some form of conversation between two or more people concerning the subject of sheepdog training. Videos solely showing a training session has not been included because such videos would not give an insight of the thoughts behind the training and handling. To assess for the validity of the statements raised during the videos, a reading of the comments to the video has been made. This reading was made both to gain additional insight to the video and to see if critical comments that could indicate some form of rejection of the arguments made during the videos could be made. It is not clear how many videos that has been watched and screened of during the process. Rather quickly the suggested videos started to circle around a few YouTube channels, probably because the style of these met the criteria of both discussion and movie illustration. However, this is unclear, because the algorithms of YouTube are not open. The name

of the YouTube channels included in the analysis and the number of videos from each channel used as reference is summarised in table 1. Pat Fanning, Emma Grey, and Andy Nickless are all professional sheepdog trainers. Emma Grey and Andy Nickless both have a series of videos where they explain and elaborate on different skills that the dog must be trained for, and how they work with their dogs to build up these skills. Pat Fanning has a series of videos where he interviews other sheepdog trainers about their experiences, and thereby a broader set of experiences is reached through this channel.

Table 1: YouTube Channels included in the analysis, and number of references from each channel

Channel name	Channel owner	Number of references
DogumentaryTV	NN	1
Churchmount Sheepdogs	Pat Fanning	4
Tim Farmer's Country Kitchen	Tim Farmer	1
Sheepdog School	Emma Grey	1
Andy Nickless	Andy Nickless	3

During the analyses of the videos, two criteria for answering research question one is used. The first criterion is related to how the trainers talk about the dogs. Do they see them as objects that has to be tamed, or do they see them as subjects with whom they must cooperate? A behaviourist approach would see the dog as an object. As referred to above, the behaviourists do not take cognition of the experimental objects into account. They are simply not interested in subjects' ability to think and act on their own. Objects only move if they are stimulated to do so. This leads to the second criterion for the analysis. Which is related to the stimuli-response idea and concerns how the trainers are related to the dogs they train through their language and actions. This criterion is a bit more difficult to assess because talking to another being can be interpreted as a stimuli-response relationship. For instance, two persons sitting at a table and having lunch. One person says to the other person: "Pass me the salt!" Without any form of hesitation, the other person passes the salt. Such situation could be interpreted as stimuli-response relationship. However, it could also be a result of an established language game between two reflective actors, as exemplified by the bricklayer example in Philosophical Investigations part 1 (Wittgenstein, 1967). However, to get beneath the surface of such a language game further analysis are needed. Analysis that can reveal potential motives and expectations from the involved parties. This opens for more complex social processes than behaviourism tend to engage with, and as such, another framework must be mobilized. In this case Pragmatic Constructivism is found suitable to inform the analysis.

3 Analysis – Sheepdog training as a reality construction process

Our training is progressing. The three novice actors have found their roles in the sheepdog training language game we are playing. The more the training progress, the more it becomes clear to me that I am not in control. Clearly, I am the pack leader. But only because I can bring Scot in a position where he can bring sheep to me. This is what qualifies me for this role in our pack. If I lose this ability or forget it, or tries to cheat him on this, then I will lose his respect in me. It is all about basic values that must be fed and kept alive if the relationship is supposed to work.

From a novice outsider's perspective, sheep handling will probably be observed as a spectacular scenery of a person standing in one place commanding a dog using a whistle, while the dog gathers sheep in a field and takes the sheep to the shepherd through agile movements behind the flock of sheep. Such scenery is the result of many hours of training.

The analysis begins with the fact dimension as this will form a basis for what the training and herding task is about, and what the handlers look for when they asses the progression of the dog. The next part concerns the possibility dimension of pragmatic constructivism. Here the analysis focus on how the trainers seek to set up possibilities for the

young dog to prosper. The third part analyse how the trainers use the basic values of the dogs as a sustainable source of motivation. Finally, it is analysed how the communication between the dog and the handler progress from something that mistakenly could be interpreted as stimulus-response directives into a language game that shows that the bond between the handler and dog is a matter of co-authoring a complex task.

3.1 Facts

Starting a puppy for sheepdog training is a highly individual case. Not every dog is ready at the same age. *"It is all about reading the dog. He will tell you when he is ready for it."* (Farmer's, 2018). What the sheep trainers do is to introduce the young dog to sheep and notice if the dog responds to the sheep in the desired fashion. *"You have to train them at their speed – not your speed."* (Fanning, 2020b). Both quotes show that the handlers perceive each dog as an individual being, that must be handled and taken care of in its own way. During the introduction period, the dog is trained to obey the lay down command. This command is introduced to stop, and thereby control the dog. Most sheepdog trainers would not begin training before this command is in place, because in the initial stages of the training this command is like an alarm stop that can be pulled if things get out of control. Later and during actual working session, the lay down command is more like a way to communicate with the dog to tell it to slow down and relief the pressure on the sheep.

The next step is to train the dog its point of balance. By point of balance is meant that the sheep are positioned right between the dog and the handler. This can be illustrated by the traditional clockface where the sheep would be in the middle, the dog positioned at 12 o'clock, the handler at 6 o'clock. The point of balance refers to the dog's pack behavioural instincts. In a larger pack, dogs would approach the prey from several sides, group them together, and press the most likely kill in the direction of the pack leader who would then kill the prey. In a sheep handling situation, there are normally only two actors, the dog, and the shepherd. Therefore, the dog must do more work, flanking the sheep to bring them to the pack leader, the shepherd.

Once the dog has found its point of balance, and the dog is able to hold this position, then it is ready to progress into the next step of creating the fundamental command for sheep herding. To move the sheep flock in a desired direction, the shepherd has to be able to communicate with the dog with the purpose of positioning the dog off the point of balance and put pressure on the flock on order to make it move. Often commands with reference to a clock, and the direction of the clock hands, are used. When the handler wants the dog to move left, seen from the handler's perspective, the handler use the command come by. When the dog should move right, the command away, is used.

So, when these basic elements are in place, the dog and the handler have the foundation for sheep handling. The purpose of sheep handling is that the dog gathers the sheep and bring them to the handler. During this action, the handler guides and assists the dog to position itself for driving the sheep to the intended end point. If the handler finds that things are getting out of control, the dog can be stopped. From here on training can progress into more complicated and even real herding sessions.

It is important to emphasise that the purpose of the basic commands discussed is not to create a remote-controlled sheep mover. With most dog you can create a robot-dog. But this would be very counterproductive, because then the handler can never experience the true potential of the dog. The handler must understand that the dog is far superior to the handler when it comes to reading and working with the sheep; the dog is the expert on this. And it is these superior skills that the handler must nurse and utilise to benefit from working with the dog. Working with a sheep dog is a matter of co-authoring. A close cooperation between two partners that depend on each other.

3.2 Possibilities

Sheepdog trainer Andy Nickless sees sheepdog training as creating possibilities for the dog to unfold its instincts. He states: *"Most dog training are achieved by earning a reward of some kind, whether they be food treat or simply earning the gratitude of the trainer. You won't train a herding dog by given it treats though. The biggest reward you can give a herding dog is to allow it to keep on working."* (Nickless, 2020a). Progressing training beyond the basic training is hence a matter of building up the dog's competences through facilitating possibilities to which the dog can respond and succeed. This process does not happen automatically. Often it is a matter of trial and error, success, and failure. It is necessary that the dog gets the possibility for doing good, and through this keep up working. Often the dog will make mistakes, and then the dog's action must but corrected by the handler. The action of correction is important, because it gives the handler the possibility to step into his or her role as the pack leader. Andy Nickless expresses it in these words: *"We know that when a sheep or cattle dog is confronted with other animals it goes into hunting mode, and as such it can be extremely difficult to control. If your dog is like this you need to be very tough with it, both to control the dog and to protect the livestock. If you are the sort of person who find it difficult to assert yourself, then unless you are extremely lucky indeed, you will struggle to train a strong-willed sheep or cattle dog. Let's be clear about this. I am not*

saying you need to be cruel to a dog or treat it harshly. Quite the reverse in fact. I believe in being kind to dogs, but there will be times when you need to be very strong-willed and determined.” (Nickless, 2020b).

Training the dog is very much a matter of building confidence in the dog. If the dog does not believe in itself, then it is very unlikely that it will become a good independent working sheepdog. “A dog’s confidence is absolutely vital. If the dog is not relaxed when it approaches the stock, they will notice immediately and they will make life difficult for the dog. ... For this reason you should make sure that the dog always wins. If it cannot bring the sheep or cattle, go and help it.” (Nickless, 2020c).

The challenge of the handler is to setup up training sessions that contains possibilities for the dog to do right, to be good. “Acceptance is a lot. Get that dog to do well instead of constantly try and change it. Then that dog will never be happy.” (Fanning, 2020c). Hence the training can only progress if the trainer makes an effort in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the individual dog, and from thereon build on the strengths, and seek improvements concerning the weaknesses of the dog by providing it with possibilities where it can learn in a successful way. As training progress these possibilities has to be still more challenging. In his training, Paddy Fanning seek to set up the training session by following this basic principle: “Making it easy for the dog, that is the trainer’s job.” (Fanning, 2020a). What he basically does is to structure the possibilities in a way that helps the dog to choose. This structuring does not determine the outcome, because the dog still has the option to choose the undesired possibility. So, managing the dog is both a matter of structuring possibilities, and guiding action.

3.3 Values

“Come and call in your dog!” my wife shouted. Again Scot had run out and sat beside the Geländewagen hoping we should go to work. “It is so frustrating that he never does what I tell him to do” - she said in a blaming tone. “How come he only listen to your commands?” “It is because I have sheep” - I replied. “If you want him to do what you tell him to, then you must also have some.”

Working with the sheepdog is a language game of survival seen from the perspective of the dog. It is the hunting instinct of the dog that sheepdog training should tap into and use in a way that serves the purpose of the shepherd. But without a strong awareness of this basic value of the dog, sheepdog training and handling is not likely to succeed. “When the dog is in what I call “hunting mode” the dog’s instinct is telling it that its very survival depends on making a kill. So its owner vainly trying to stop it, is likely to be regarded as some sort of imbecile, who does not have the faintest idea of how to kill their food.” (Nickless, 2020a). Clearly, the dog must in no way harm the sheep. This means that the training must draw on instrumental values that can compensate for the dog’s intention to kill the sheep. Here the instrumental value comes from another instinct of the dog, its pack behaviour. In a flock of wolves, it is the flock leader who does the kill and eats first. Therefore, it is essential that the sheepdog handler can maintain hers or his position as pack leader. If not, the dog will take over, and get out of control, which in essence means that it will begin hunting on its own. Since the basic value of survival through living and working in a pack is stronger than being the leader, the handler can team up with the dog and make it work, if the dog is allowed to work. The highest value there is for a sheepdog is to work sheep. They are not doing it for the handler, they are doing it for themselves. Being allowed to work is the biggest reward a handler can give. “If you got a good dog that want to work, you can tap into that. That is worth a lot more to that dog than if you pad him or praise him. A good dog does not need that. The good dog knows he is a good dog if you let him work. He just wants sheep, give me sheep. It is that simple.” (Fanning, 2021).

3.4 Communication

What is wrong with you Scot? Why do you not listen to what I say? You keep going away when I ask you to go come by! Suddenly I noticed the look in his eyes. You ignorant was written in them. He had brought the sheep right to my feet. I was the problem. I had made a large pen, and suddenly I realised that I was standing in the wrong position. I move into the back of the pen, and right away Scot led the sheep into the pen, laid down at the pen opening and waited for me to go by the sheep and close the pen. Gosh - I felt like an amateur.

Communicating with the dog is a highly sophisticated practice that develops through training and hard work handling the sheep. The initial commands are the starting point for training. To begin with they are commands: away, come by, lay down. As training and practice evolves the intention of the commands change. Instead of doing this (stimuli-response, you might say) the commands change into a form of guidance that the handler gives to the dog. Andy Nickless in one of his videos gives an example where he trains outruns with a dog. He wants it to run clockwise around the sheep, because in that direction there is a wet area that the sheep may have run into if the dog had run the other way around. Hence the reason for this type of command is not to control directly, but more to help the dog solve its task. In a

video talking about training the stop, Emma Grey illustrates this by recommending that when you train the stop it should be done when the dog is at the point of balance, as at this point, the dog will naturally slow down (Grey, 2022). The idea is to give the command at a time when the dog is most open for doing what you want it to do. Timing of the command seems to be important when communicating with the dog. One cannot expect the dog to respond to a certain command at any time. The dog somehow must be in a mode of receptiveness if the communication should lead to a desired action. The communication is hence a matter of co-authoring the task with the dog.

In a conversation between Paddy Fanning and the Canadian sheepdog trainer Scott Glen they talk about communication with the dogs and how Scott uses this to assess the dog and to develop the dog (Fanning, 2020c):

Paddy: *When you are talking about a smart dog or intelligent dog, what are the little indicators you look for?*

Scott: *You got to allow a dog to be a smart dog. So if you see a dog being a little bit disobedient, and you see well it saved my butt there, you showed a real good move there, instead of always thinking you took the wrong flank, that was not what I wanted. We must let them use their head, if we do not allow them to use their head, then they will never be better. The dog is better reading the sheep than I am. Once they are 600 feet away, they must do the job better than me, because I cannot see the sheep.*

And later in the interview:

Paddy: *The impression I get from you is that when you are training the dog you are looking for obedience, but at the same time you are giving him a chance of developing his own notion of what is going on, you hang back and let the dog work. Is that what you mean when say that you have their head a little bit in place and see what he thought.*

Scott: *For me at least, I got to let the dog show me its strengths and weaknesses, and whether it listens or not.*

When we are talking communication with a dog, it is obvious that it cannot take form as a conversation between two human beings. The quote above indicates that communication is an ongoing interplay between action made by the dog, and reaction made by the trainer in the form of either letting the dog continue its job or correcting its job via commands. This form of communication is far from stimuli-response communication. It is co-authoring in practice. Two actors who jointly tap into each other's reality construction concerning solving a joint task which is to gather sheep.

The training session must end. Scot is obviously tired. Despite this, he is very disappointed when I command him to go out of the ring. His eyes and movements indicate an open question. Why are we stopping? What is wrong? Though I praise him for his efforts he could not care less. Rewarding him with a treat would be taken as an insult. It is clear, he is not working for me. We are working together. Two actors co-authoring a complicated play about handling a third actor - the sheep. It all goes on at an incredible high pace. Using a complicated language game where the handler's commands only play a minor role compared to the dog's professional assessment of the specific situation in the exact moment.

4 Discussion

The paper started out by addressing two research questions. The first research question raised was: how is the language game of sheepdog trainers related to the behaviourism idea? Two criteria for answering this question were set up. The first criteria relate to how the trainers talk about dogs. Do they see them as objects that have to be tamed, or do they see them as subjects with whom they must cooperate? Concerning this criterion, the answer is quite clear. The trainers perceive their dogs as subjects. They refer to the dog by name, or using the pronoun he, independent of the biological sex of the dog, indicating a recognition of the dog as an individual subject. The trainers recognise the personality of the dog, that each dog has strengths and weaknesses, and the goal of the trainers is to cultivate the good sides of the dog. It is through the recognition of the personality of the dog that further training can proceed. This leads to the second criteria for the analysis. Which is related to the stimuli-response idea and concerns how the trainers are related to the dogs they train through their language and actions. Because the trainers perceive the dogs as subjects with an independent will, the perception and idea of training is not based on obtaining a stimuli-response mode – they do not want a robot dog. One practical reason for this is that the whole purpose of training a sheepdog is to develop an individual who can work independently far from the handler. Therefore, developing and nursing the independence and confidence of the dog is germane for its ability to carry out its work.

Proponents of behaviourism may argue that what the sheepdog trainers do is similar to Skinner's theory of operant behaviour (e.g. Skinner, 1958). For instance, by letting the dog work, as an example of positive reinforcement. Or taking the dog away from the sheep as a form of punishment. This may be true, but only on the surface. Because where behaviourism will seek to change the behaviour of its objects without taking their values into consideration, the trainers obviously seek to tap into the values of the dogs. That they often do so by different sorts of reinforcement may be the case, but the important difference is that the sheepdog trainers do so in order to cultivate the values of the dog and create a forum in which the dog and the handler can co-author a reality concerning solving a common task for the benefit of both parties based on different forms of cognition. Also, the fact that the dog will continue to work indicates that something else than behaviourism is at stake. If the dog were driven by forms of conditioned stimulus, then it could be expected that extinction would happen, and the dog would stop working. Thereby it can be presumed that the language game of sheepdog trainers is not based on a behaviourism idea.

This leads to the second research question raised, which is: how do the sheepdog trainers construct a reality that works in relation to handling sheep in cooperation with a dog? From a pragmatic constructivist perspective, the language of the sheepdog trainers indicates a great concern about understanding and building on the values of the dog. What drives the dogs is their will to work with sheep. A will to work, not because they are hungry or being electrified like the pigeons or rats in Skinner's experiments, but because the dog values this activity. The will to work is the basic value of the dogs that the trainers seek to cultivate and shape into a practice that can be used for the benefit of both parties in a form of co-authorship. Cultivating and shaping as made by preparing for and utilising specific situations that are valuable for the dog.

Forming valuable possibilities for the dog during the training is what the handler does. Setting the scene, adjusting action with a few commands, and allowing the dog to work and become good is the essence of sheepdog training. Basically, allowing the dog to work with respect of its integrity and professionalism.

The paper started out by questioning the premise of behaviourism. The analysis indicates that if Pavlov had used his dogs for more demanding tasks than drooling, as in this case sheepdog training, and his ideas had travelled into management thinking along this path, then we would probably have seen management models, techniques, and ideals that had the single cognitive actor in focus. Hundred years ago, where production companies introduced the principles of scientific management, managers may have been able to seek inspiration from behaviourism in their approach to the employees of the company, because the whole idea of scientific management was to utilise a labour force that should not think. Thinking was supposed to take place outside the assembly line. People had to become robots and act as programmed. The problem is that humans are not good at being robots. And fortunately, the jobs along the assembly lines have been taken over by experts, real robots who excel in doing what they are told to do. Instead, humans have been given other roles. Roles that require skilled expertise, professionalism, and the ability to assess complex situations, and make decisions locally. Just like a working sheepdog.

Interestingly, the findings made through the analysis presented in this paper is not new. For instance Drucker, who coined the term knowledge-worker has similar suggestions for how to manage and motivate people (e.g. Drucker, 1999). In a broader literature study Karen Carlton (2011) concludes support for these ideas, and so does Davenport et al (2002) and Horwitz et al. (2003) just to mention a few. Despite these insights, practising management of knowledge workers seems to be difficult, and often managers tend to turn towards managerial practices evolved for the industrial workplace.

Autonomy and respect for the integrity and the values of an individual seem to be a central point when it comes to managing knowledge-workers. Lewis et al. (2019) discuss the paradoxes that arise between control and empowerment when organisations delegate responsibility and autonomy to employees. Though autonomy and empowerment do not refer to the same phenomena, there are similarities between these concepts that will justify the use of their ideas for the following discussions. Lewis et al. draw on two forms of empowerment in their analysis. They talk about structural empowerment, which is related to the management control systems in the organisation, and how these systems are designed to delegate autonomy to people in the organisation. The other form of empowerment they label psychological empowerment. They divide this form into four dimensions. Meaning, is related to the extent that people find value in their work. Impact, that describes how people feel they can make a difference through their efforts. Competences that address people's feeling of having the right capabilities to fulfil their job. Self-determination, that reflects the extent to which people have choice and discretion to make choices in their work-life.

Merging the two forms of empowerment, three scenarios of empowerment can evolve. There is the illusory empowerment, where people experience that they are highly psychologically empowered, but the structural empowerment is low, and hence a hindrance for them to unfold their capabilities and contribute to their organisation the way they feel supposed to do. The opposite scenario is labelled obstructed empowerment. Here the structures designed through the management control system provide the people in organisation with a suitable space to manoeuvre within, but the psychological empowerment becomes a hindrance to do so. Examples could be that there is no clear goal to aim for, whereby it is difficult to find meaning in the work people do. It could be that people experience that no matter how hard they work, it is difficult to obtain impact and reach the goals set. It could be that people are not sufficiently trained

or skilled for the job they have been asked to perform. And finally, the informal structures or culture of the organisation is a hindrance for people to do their work in a satisfactory way. The third scenario is termed authentic empowerment. In this scenario there is a balance between a well-designed management control system and thereby structural empowerment, and the psychological empowerment. Hence, the main contribution from Lewis et al. (2019) in relation to this paper is that managing an organisation whose success depends on the performance of knowledge-workers also must take the practice around the management control system into consideration.

In search for empirical evidence that can support the findings of his paper, the field of New Public Management can be of assistance. New Public Management is relevant because historically, public management has been managed by professionals from the respective professions, and thereby rooted in the values of these professions, and not in an administrative professional set of values (e.g. Halford and Leonard, 1998). New Public Management have diffused into the public administration in most countries since the introduction of the term in the 1980s (e.g. Hood, 1995, Dunleavy and Hood, 1994, Hyndman and Lapsley, 2016). A central part of New Public Management is to divide planning and control from the execution of public services and a major element of this has been to put a strong emphasis on the employment of management control systems (e.g. Broadbent and Laughlin, 2005). New Public Management hence serves as an example of this shift from individualism and professionalism to standardisation, and research from this field can provide recent indications for what may happen to people when their abilities to act according to their professional values are restricted.

For the professional knowledge workers, New Public Management often comes with a feeling of a violation, or even a loss, of their professional values and what can be interpreted as illusory empowerment (Newman and Lawler, 2009). The violation of values is driven by a change of focus from the quality of the work into a focus on quantity of the work, and thereby a transformation from knowledge worker to a perception of an industrial worker under behaviourism inspired management practices. This development has particularly had negative consequences for professions characterised by female values (Davies and Thomas, 2002). In their study, Strandås et al. (2019) show that nurses tend to develop strategies in their work that can safeguard their professional values. Unfortunately these strategies often lead to high levels of stress (e.g. Kirkpatrick et al., 2005). Paradoxically such employee reactions are not problematic in a New Public Management regime, since people under stress are more likely to surrender to the system (Diefenbach, 2009). Burns & Jollands (2022) report from British universities about how managements' performance, and thereby rewards, has become increasingly linked to the external signifiers. This has created a situation where traditional academic values have come under pressure and placed the everyday academics in what Burns & Jolland label "a pressure cooker situation" where they constantly have to compromise their academic values and produce a job they know could and should have been better. Mauro et al. (2021) investigate a case in an Italian Ministry concerning the translation of performance-based budgeting (PBB) into practice. Rather than engaging in a co-authoring process, the professional actors were left with illusionary constructs, and they thereby failed to deliver the intended changes because they could not bring their professional competences into play. Common for these examples is that the management control systems decouple the professionals and leave them in a form of illusion where they can no longer be loyal to their professional values. These professionals are left without valuable possibilities and thereby unable to act.

Kärreman et al. (2002) investigate two knowledge-intensive private sector firms. In opposition to the literature that the authors engage with, the authors find that the two case companies employ forms of bureaucratization, which is employment of formal management control systems. The authors are not precise in what specific techniques that the two companies make use of. But they conclude that the control systems are not all-embracing or penetrating. Instead the bureaucratization provides support for the core businesses, and serves as a vehicle for fostering shared meaning, and " ... an exercise in reflexivity." (Kärreman et al., 2002). These findings indicate that management control systems are also relevant in knowledge-intensive firms to guide the actions of knowledge workers and to inform them about the status of their work efforts (e.g. Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004, Drucker, 1999). Hence it is the practice of bringing these techniques into play that is interesting and relevant to bear in mind.

The brief introduction to management of knowledge workers made above indicates a dilemma between a disciplining use of management control systems, that will leave knowledge workers demotivated and with violated values, and a kind of laissez-faire management style, where the knowledge worker is left in a limbo without goals and ideas of the extent to which goals have been achieved. This indicates that management control systems do have a relevance also in relation to managing knowledge workers, but that the practice of such systems must be something else than Plan, Do, Control as known from the industrial era.

One form of practice that can be used to balance the dilemma is an interactive/reflective epistemic method (Magnacca and Giannetti, 2023). An epistemic method is a practice of knowledge creation that involves organised processes and techniques in a specific setting (Liboriussen et al., 2021, Trenca, 2016). Practising an epistemic method involves reflections upon actions taken to meet certain ends. It also requires that the actor is able to explain and argue in favour for these reflections regarding how and why these actions are expected to lead to these ends, a form of practice argument. An explanation of the intention behind certain actions, why and how these actions are found to lead to the desired results, and that the actor can account for positive experiences that can provide evidence for the expected

means-end relationship (Jakobsen, 2024). Not all epistemic practices can be expected to turn out successfully. Mauro et al. (2023) distinguish between interactive/reflective epistemic methods and authoritative/mechanical epistemic methods. The interactive/reflective epistemic method is based on an equal and dialogical approach to the phenomena of interest. All parties in the dialogue attempts to contribute to the creation of meaning and reasoning. There is a form of humbleness towards the employed means and their ability to lead to the desired ends. Thereby a practice where the current truth is constantly challenged will be found when an interactive/reflective epistemic method is practiced. It is important to note that such practice does not necessarily lead to forms of paralysation, where nothing is done because people only think, but never act. More likely, practice and action will be driven by a learning cycle of truth (Nørreklit, 2017b). A bit like the practice of sheep handling where sheepdog and the handler communicate through action and commands, the working the sheep towards the handler, who gives commands to adjust the work of the dog in an atmosphere of co-authorship.

In opposition is the authoritative/mechanical epistemic method. This method is not driven by curiosity, respect, and reflection. Instead, the authoritative/mechanical epistemic method is driven by established epistemological sources, and thereby the possibilities for action are determined by the perspective provided by these sources without further questioning. Communication is monological, and it limits inspiration and new insights. An authoritative/mechanical epistemic method is often found in a New Public Management regime, where the control systems fence in the possible action, leaving very limited possibility for professional judgment in concrete situations. Taken to the extreme, the authoritative/mechanical epistemic method can lead to a situation where practice is no longer driven by knowledge (episteme). Instead, beliefs and idiosyncratic opinions (doxa) will form and direct practice.

To promote an interactive/reflective epistemic method, a revision of the management ideal that we seem to have inherited, must be made. In the beginning of this paper the picture of a foreman in his beige smock, who knows the best and is able to plan, what the blue-collar workers are supposed to do, and who hold the authority to sanction those who do not live up to the plans made, was drawn. Instead, it was suggested that the managerial ideal should be more like a janitor, a facilitator who provides valuable possibilities for their colleagues. This analogy is consistent with the findings from the cases of the sheepdog trainers. Quates like: “*We must let them use their head, if we do not allow them to use their head, then they will never be better.*”, “*If you got a good dog that want to work, you can tap into that.*”, “*It is all about reading the dog.*” indicates this, and can serve as inspiration for how to manage actors both through direct communication and indirectly via the practices around employed management models and techniques.

5 Conclusion

Managing and motivating a knowledge worker in a modern workplace may benefit from some of the findings from this paper. First, managing knowledge workers must be done by forming valuable possibilities for the employees. This means that the professional values must be at the centre of communicating with the employee. The employee must first and foremost be seen as a professional whose goal is to be good within his or her professional field. He or she must be given the freedom to act professionally. As the sheepdogs, some are more experienced than others, some have more strengths than others. But punishing these will not make them good. What will make them good is to put them in situations they master and learn from it. From these successes they will grow. Management of people is hence a matter of acknowledging the individual and provide this individual with valuable possibilities that will enable her or him to act professionally good. To support these learning processes, appropriate management control systems can be of great assistance. However, the success of this requires that the management control system is practiced along with an interactive/reflective epistemic method.

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